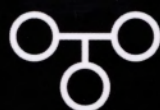
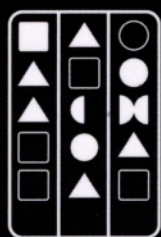




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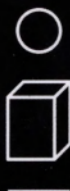
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[Ne]3s²3p⁴



*Beginnings offer you no power.
It is what you do that is in your power;
it is how you end which counts.*

ACCESS: MOST RESTRICTED
DECRYPTION KEY: Z2TET3C4WZTLRL8NV5KS\$IKO-006
REP#: 1851-GHOSTS-SUS
AGENT(S): CHA-319

**SUBJ: INITIAL REPORT ON UNPAIRED GHOST
COMMUNITIES.**

1. Hey friend!
2. I know I'm not allowed to say that to the Warlock Vanguard or to IKO-006, but given that we're under double-trouble encryption, I'm going to say it anyway. How's your whole mess in the City? Glad I missed all that...
3. I've completed my "Ethnographic Survey of Itinerant Unpaired Ghosts Who Prefer Intra-Ghost Interactions." It'll make a neat paper. As a cover story, it was pretty good! These Ghosts tend to be thoughtful and introverted, so like most introverts, they respond well to people who are interested in their thoughts. And they seemed to find it very self-affirming to dislike me! I guess it's nice to confirm you still prefer yourself to other people.
4. These introverted Ghosts spend a lot of time hovering in circles, philosophizing. The longer they've been away from people (sorry, Human people—Ghosts are people, too), the less they care about hovering at head height or facing each other when they talk. After a few months, they'll just scatter around a space facing every whichway, like they're each posing for a photo. When they're not talking, I get the feeling that they're just... sensing. The same way they can divine the character of a long-dead corpse. Whatever you want to call that faculty, they're using it.
5. Speaking of, are we still doing the sunyata friendship thing? Treating each other as sacred voids? If so, I'm allowed to say anything to you, and you are allowed to say anything to me, and we each trust the other to receive it without hurt. So, I'm allowed to say—I'm not sure people out here like you very much, Ikora. They don't know who you are; they don't have a sense of what you stand for.

And you know, I do get that. I had to sneak up on you in your private library to surprise you and (I know you INSIST I didn't really surprise you, but still...) even then,

you talked to me about circles. Circles! Do you know what the Traveler's reawakening meant for the geometry of circles? You told me it changed everything about the semiotic role of circles in some paracausal invocation of the Light. And I'm going to tell you the truth, which is, you didn't want to talk to me, so you talked about circles instead. I know people who can talk *in* circles, but you're the only one who can do it by talking *about* circles. I really admire your efficiency.

6. These Ghosts without Guardians argue about two things. One is the exact nature of their connection to their undiscovered Guardian. Is each Ghost predestined to find one and exactly one soul to raise as a Guardian? Or does each Ghost have a taste, a set of preferences that many dead people might satisfy? Could a Ghost potentially raise *anyone*? Does the choice of a partner lie within the Ghost, or is it a mission assigned by the Traveler?
7. They also argue over how one should interact *with* their chosen Guardian. Should Ghosts accede to whatever their partner demands? Or is a Ghost's relationship with a Guardian a negotiated bond between equals and codependents? Heavy stuff. But I guess it's the same argument people always have about their relationships. Is there such a thing as true love, or just the love we decide we're going to make work?
8. What is this thing we do, Ikora? Are you my one true love, am I yours? We agreed it's not love like most people have love. Nobody's getting married or turning up arm-in-arm at the Crimson Ball. It's a special and radical kind of friendship, right? That's what you said. An endogenous need to strike the lies away from another soul. It's the promise to seek truth in each other without mercy or fear, but always with compassion.

So: speaking mercilessly and fearlessly, but with compassion, where is our friendship now? What does it mean? Does it mean that I check in on you every few years and otherwise just let you do your thing? Is that your nature—to draw away forever while I chase after you and nag to be sure you're all right? Friend, you are not Mara Sov, and I am not one of her cadre. I'm not doing that. I want to see more of you, and I want you to want that.

9. Maybe I shouldn't expect a lot of personal insight from the woman who wrote the Hidden creed. Which reads, and I quote, "Find thy self. Know thy self. Destroy thy self." But I'm really worried that if people don't know you, they might end up destroying you. Our much-foreshadowed Stranger saw the future, Ikora. You were dead. Dead because someone you trusted turned on all of us.
10. Can't end on nine paragraphs. Too spooky! I noticed one common thread among these unpaired Ghosts. They REALLY like the Books of Sorrow. Ever since Eris deciphered the calcified fragments, Guardians have been fascinated by the history of the Hive. But these Ghosts—I don't think it's fascination. I think it's pity. They see the Hive as an exploited underclass, for goodness' sake! Victims of a cosmic parasite that tricked the poor krill into eternal slavery. No wonder they haven't found their Guardians. They don't want to help anyone kill Hive!

But this is troubling, isn't it? Because if Ghosts can decide that they have moral qualms with raising Guardians, and if they can convince other Ghosts to follow suit... we're going to need a program of counter-persuasion. We'll have to start keeping an eye on the morale and loyalty of our own Ghosts.

This way lies a terrible future.

MESSAGE ENDS

FIRST CALLING OF THE HIDDEN, ANNOTATED

I feel the need to ground my commentary here with anecdote.

1. Find thy self.

To be Osiris's student was to orbit a star. The man would occlude you if you let him; and if you came too close, you would be burnt. It became tempting to define yourself only by your distance and angle with relation to him: "Today he is distracted but warm, so I am at a close approach but a high inclination." This was a mistake. You must know who you are with respect to yourself. This is not an emotional allegory! If you intend to conduct thanatonaautics alongside a teacher, to die and become as fire and return to life, you must know what parts of you are yours!

Accurate knowledge is impossible if you do not understand the device by which knowledge is obtained. One of humanity's most monumental achievements is the metric system, an enduring system of measure usable by all people in all situations. But the metric system had a flaw: its units were defined by physical objects. The standard kilogram was an ingot of platinum and iridium. This ingot changed over time, as all material things must; and therefore, it was unreliable. The metric system was not completed until the kilogram found a truer, more absolute definition based on pure knowledge: in this case, Planck's universal constant.

In the future, we may discover that Planck's constant varies between different volumes of the multiverse. If we do, we will need to find a truer definition of the kilogram. So it is that this is the first step—finding thy self—so that you may know the instrument by which you obtain knowledge, and it is ever ongoing.

2. Know thy self.

I thought I knew my self. I'd fought in the Crucible, which requires self-knowledge to check the impulses that control most Crucible players. ("I'll go straight to the ammo drop again; this time, it'll turn out differently." No, fool, it will not!) I'd flown high-risk scouting missions far from Earth, and always returned. I had even bargained with an Ahamkara and, I thought, come out ahead. What I had wished for was a teacher greater than me.

But I did not know my self. I could find myself, certainly, but the map is not the territory. Just because I could locate Ikora Rey did not mean I could enter Ikora Rey and understand her: and if you do not know the interior mechanism of a device, you do not know what the device will do.

I found myself in a place of crisis. The Vanguard had determined that the Ahamkara had to be made extinct. But to confront Ahamkara, you must know and accept exactly what it is you desire—you must let it pass through you without either repudiation or longing, or it will become a wish for the Ahamkara to feed upon. And oh, the longings I hated to have! To shatter Ophiuchus, to astound my critics with a display of my full power, to die alongside Osiris and be reborn as one being in an

eternity of fire, to burn poor Chalco to a temporary, smoking smear and laugh at her astonishment... we are all full of these perverse impetuositities.

It is one thing to purge yourself of all incorrect and unacceptable thought. It is another to know it and accept it and to let it be.

When you have reliable instruments of measurement, you may then measure yourself. Truth is universal, but universal truth can only be acquired through personal truth. This is the foundational paradox of Gnosticism. To know anything beyond the self requires self-knowledge, but the self cannot be known without understanding the laws that drive it, which can only be known by observing the world. How do we escape this cycle?

This conundrum offers an escape from the Boltzmann-brain solipsistic trap. The trap asks us, "How do you know that you are not the only thing in existence, and that the universe you perceive is not a random moment emerged from chaos?" The answer is that a randomly emerged illusionary brain, the product of a probabilistic demiurge, is cosmically unlikely to contain *both* the memory of an imaginary universe *and* knowledge of consistent mathematical and physical laws of which describe that whole. If the world is an illusion, then why would it produce the illusion of a physics that can consistently explain its existence? Which is more probable: that we and all we see are an enormous coincidence, or that reality is in fact determined and evolved by a consistent set of laws? The existence of an objective reality is more probable. If objective reality exists, we exist in it. The truth that we see in the world around us allows us to induce the truth of our own persistent existence.

To know thy self is not only to look within but also without. It is impossible to know thy self without knowledge of the universe.

3. Destroy thy self.

When I battled Azirim, he defeated me. He showed me that he could make all my desires real, and I succumbed. It was Wei Ning who broke me out of the trance-of-creation I had fallen into, moments before I manifested a wish from the quantum vacuum: four dead strangers returned to life, forgiven their desperate grab for my Ghost, so that I could forgive myself for how quickly and lethally I had responded. If I had finished the wish and fashioned them, I would have annihilated myself, Ophiuchus, and everything around us in a particle-antiparticle catastrophe.

What Wei Ning did was punch me in the head so gently that I only got a concussion. I do not advise this as a way to destroy the self. But as an analogy, it is useful.

When you have located your self, destroy your self. Grip your self like a hand shaking a hand, find the weak places, and squeeze. Throw your self at yourself like a rising tide upon an ancient fortress. Do not stop when your soft places are eroded. You must continue until nothing remains. In this manner, you will gain two vital *gnoses*: the revealed knowledge of your own strengths and failings, and the practiced knowledge of how to reconstruct your self when destroyed.

In one Gnostic tradition, our universe is the creation of Barbelo and Sophia, whose mimicry of the Unknown God's emanations gave rise to Yaldabaoth, the lion-headed serpent. Yaldabaoth the Demiurge crafted our world and the Archons that rule it in mimicry of the true spiritual world, which is called pleroma. Upon creating humanity, Yaldabaoth declared itself the true creator, unaware that it itself was only a mimic of the Unknown God.

The key understanding here lies not in this fabulism, nor even in Yaldabaoth's failure to destroy itself and reveal the truth, but in the relationship between the Gnostic tradition and the Book of Genesis. This Gnostic tale comes before the traditional Genesis, totally recontextualizing it—even destroying it. In retaliation for this transformation, the Gnostics were destroyed by more orthodox faith.

We cannot understand ourselves unless we know our own origins; and we cannot accept our origins unless we are willing to destroy ourselves.

4. Shed thy self.

When I battled Madhir, he tried the same trick as Azirim. But I simply became someone else. I do not mean that I pretended to be someone else. I mean that I allowed Madhir to change me into someone who Madhir could not tempt.

I laugh much less since that day. But I am more content.

Rub at the thin, dry outer parts of yourself. Crawl shining and wet from that outer husk.

All misjudgment is caused by the failure to shed the self. We constantly make poor decisions, knowing that they will hurt us and isolate us, because these decisions allow us to sustain our stories of who we are. When we are angry, we choose to act in anger, even if we know we could de-escalate. When we are wounded, we make the choices a wounded person would make, even when we know these choices will deepen the wound. Who would do otherwise?

To refuse the choice we want to make is to refuse our self, and that makes us afraid. We are afraid to change who we are. Unless we have a habit, a natural capability to escape our own nature. So we must acquire that capability.

It is impossible to escape the cage of the self by any means except shedding.

5. Embrace a new skin.

I was at the Great Disaster, when the Vanguard rallied its Guardians against omens of doom centered on our moon. We used the same group tactics against Crota that we had employed against the Ahamkara. It is hard to withstand many Guardians, and hard to use paracausal trickery to derange many minds at once.

Swiftly and terribly, we learned our error. The sword logic finds the weakest part of a structure and destroys it. A mass of Guardians is full of joints and weaknesses to cut through. Today, we fight in fireteams of three: a triangle, the basic shape of a truss; the strongest shape in nature.

We, the eternally reborn Guardians, agelessly returning to our favorite state, failed to learn the real lesson of the Great Ahamkara Hunt: that in order to assume a new form, you must cast off the old one. The Ahamkara succeeded in that transformation. We failed.

When you have left behind the dry husk of your self, you will find yourself in the strata of dry husks, an infinite compost of uninhabited might-yet-be. In order to don another self, you must enter it and embrace it wholly. You must accept it without reservation. This is terrifying, because to wholly accept transformation is to wholly accept death.

This is the confrontation with the ego death, the psyche death, the collapse of connections between the mediotemporal and higher cortical brain networks.

Its successful resolution comes with the understanding that there is no persistent self, only a set of rules by which we temper our own changes. That which does not change at all is dead. That which changes wholly explodes. We are the middle course. We are the place between the dead coal and the blazing fire.

6. Become the many.

I was a solitary adventurer, but I had to become a leader and teacher. I do not mean that I have become greater or gained a higher authority. I mean that I have learned to surrender my own desires in favor of acting for a common good. The needs of many impel me. This was not a balm for all difficulties; it created new problems. I nearly lost Ophiuchus this way: he was my complement, the strength to counterpose my weaknesses. And when I tried to become someone who existed for everyone, I left him nothing to exist for at all.

This path is not a simple one. I sometimes lose sight of which way is forward.

This step is simple, which is why it is the hardest of all. When you have mastered the ability to escape yourself, and then take on a new self, you will then abandon the need to be a self.

This is easiest for the Dawnblade, who understands the "self" as a perturbation of a field, like a vortex in water—a place of constant change, not separate from but continuous with the surrounding universe. For Hunters, this step may arrive from study of the natural world, or from immersion in the Human communities around us. For Titans, devotion to duty or to the perfection of certain acts is the natural path.

All must arrive at this realization in their own way.

7. We are as unseen. We are as death.

I failed the Traveler, and I failed Cayde.

I asked Zavala to declare war on the Reef and to affix Uldren Sov's head on the queen's empty throne. I had lost my self; I did not know my self; I did not destroy my self. If I had, I would have done nothing. But in the Red War, I could only do nothing, and so now, doing nothing felt like a trap. I wanted to do something; and so, I argued we should go into Savathûn's snare.

I spoke bitter words about Zavala then. But he was right. If we had done nothing, the curse would never have taken the Dreaming City.

Failure visits us as inevitably as death. But we are reborn. There are no second chances, not for any choice we make: but there is always the chance to do better at the next one.

Death comes unseen to all of us, and we do not know the hour of its coming or the face it will wear.

We are the Hidden, and we must be as death. They do not know the hour of our approach or the face we will wear. All knowledge ends in us; and yet, we are beyond knowing.

But as Hidden, we must also accept that we do not see all, and we do not know the hour of our own death. We are the final repository of knowledge, as the grave is the final library. But we cannot know our own death until it has taken us beyond all knowing.

How is it possible to fully know oneself when oneself will not be finished and complete until death?

There is a right answer to this paradox.

//

We are all going to die

*it's all right to be afraid to be angry to be alone with the thought for a while you know
you'll never be alone after you die so loneliness is only for the living and being alone is being
fiercely alive*

The trick is to make sure we do not all die at once.

*Some of us will die and some will go on. And then those who went on will die, but more will
go on. And this cycle will continue, and as long as it does, something of us will be part of it.
Three and a half billion years ago, something came to life on Earth, and we are all part of it.
It has never died.*

We are all going to die; but not yet. Not yet.

//

CONSENSUS PERSONAL

VANCINCTAN CMDR ZAVALA >> VANCINCLOCK IKORA REY

This is your latest move? Ikora, I'm hurt. Placing that stone at 6x24 is clearly suboptimal. You're going easy on me, and I won't have it.

REY >> ZAVALA

Trust me. I have a feeling it'll make a more interesting game. If you don't believe me, put the game state into a go engine.

ZAVALA >> REY

Balderdash. The fact that you have a 50.41% win rate against me doesn't mean you can afford to treat me like I'm not here. By my reading, my whole position on the left flank is quite harmonious. I have the advantage in liberties and in initiative. You may have the better sense for the abstract game, Ikora, but I am a better logistician. And I know that 6x24 undermines your endgame.

REY >> ZAVALA

Playing the conventional move here will drive this game into an echo of those we've played before. Just a *joseki* writ large; we already know those moves. Whereas 6x24 puts us in a totally new board state.

ZAVALA >> REY

I'll get back to you after the Consensus meeting, or you'll be distracted the whole time trying to think up your reply.

ACCESS: RESTRICTED
DECRYPTION KEY: 2CA9SXUO2C\$IKO-006
REP#: 091-STASIS-TEST
AGENT(S): TRU-135

SUBJ: LATEST STASIS BEHAVIORS

1. Now I know you think I'm a steady old hand so you give me the weird jobs on the theory that if I spook then it's worth getting spooked. But this one has me worried. Does no one any good to play with fire. Or cold as the case may be. Either way you get burnt.
2. All right here are my observations on the use of Stasis.

The virulence of Stasis against other Guardians has generally decreased. Withering Blade doesn't bite so deep or freeze so solid. Glacial Quake won't catch so many cold-footed. Now why is this?

Partly I reckon that Guardians have learned to counteract the effects of Stasis with their own Light. Heat what's cold and whatnot. But the experimentalists out here mutter that Stasis has a mind of its own: which is strange right because they all insist that "the Darkness comes from within us," that it's a part of them, some residue of the Cambrian explosion or whatever. The real Darkness was inside us all along. Which is it? Is Darkness in all of us or has it got a mind of its own? We need to answer that question.

Let's say they're right and Stasis has in some way changed itself. Why would Stasis weaken its effect against other Guardians? I'll tell you exactly why. Same reason a virus evolves a strain that won't kill its host. People were turning against Stasis, didn't like what it was doing to their Crucible. So Stasis made itself nicer. So we'd keep on using it. If Stasis was *better* than what the Traveler gave us we wouldn't be able to accept it as just another colorful species of whoopass. We might get scared of it.

But this way it's nice and balanced. Everything kept in proper balance. And doesn't "balance" sound like a goal worth striving for?

3. Now you asked me to keep an eye out for signs of cruelty among the Stasis users. But it strikes me there's a problem here. In the old days we would call it "statistical comorbidity" but maybe you fancy Warlocks have some deeper understanding of synchronicity or hidden concordance or whatnot. What I mean is can we tell if Stasis makes people cruel or reckless or in the best cases very bold? I see Stasis users who shouldn't have any kind of power, never mind Stasis. And I see decent Guardians who took to Stasis as an urgent necessity. It's the old question about Thorn. Was Dredgen Yor corrupted by his weapon? Or did he just need an excuse?

Maybe Stasis really is just a tool. Maybe the only moral valence it has is what we bring to it.

4. Cowlick still refuses to examine the Stasis crystals with her own unique senses and I'm not gonna make her. Poor Ghost shouldn't have to stare into what hurts her. Best details she could get with secular instruments attached. However Cowlick is pleased as pinch to go over the results and come up with theories. I'll leave the "Flack parametric analysis" and all the other numbers to her...
5. Now I do know something about viruses from my frontier medicine days. I know that gentler strains of a virus have a competitive advantage if they keep their host alive long enough to jump to a new one. So we can imagine Stasis as a virus, maybe even a virus with purpose—limiting its virulence so as to get at the rest of us.

But we've got to remember that a virus only evolves to go easy on its host when that makes it more successful. It's a myth that all diseases evolve to coexist peacefully with us. A virus will crank up its lethality to 99% so long as that viciousness also lets it reach a new host. If a virus could make people explode like rotten balloons and infect everyone nearby, a virus would do it. Viruses don't give a damn for anything except making more of themselves.

They certainly don't give a damn for their own long-term viability—they're too stupid to think that far in advance.

So keep that in mind when it comes to assessing the safety of Stasis. After all it is a power we use to explode each other like rotten balloons.

And keep in mind also that a virus isn't evil. It just wants to exist. If there really is a distinction between Stasis-as-a-power and the voice in those ships, if one can be separated from the other, then maybe Stasis isn't intrinsically corrupting. Or maybe it is corrupting but only when it's tied to the voice behind it. Maybe we can wrest it free. Who knows? Not me.

Truce out.

MESSAGE ENDS

Mara said there was a difference between Darkness as a force and the will that guided it. But there is no question that the interlopers led us to stasis.

The enemy has given us a tool. Does that make the tool the enemy?

APPENDED FILE: COWLICK'S ANALYSIS OF STASIS

The Stasis crystals aren't water ice. Obvious enough, but I thought I'd get it out of the way. The extraordinary property of Stasis is its ability to create ordered structures from chaos—it doesn't care what kind of matter is available; it just sucks entropy out of the system until it's got a crystal. The crystal's not exactly chemical. The normal electromagnetic interactions between atoms are suppressed in favor of something weirder. A bit like spinmetal.

Examination by scanning and tunneling electron microscope (plus X-ray crystallography and neutron diffraction, if we want to be exhaustive) revealed a highly ordered crystalline structure at the nanometer scale. Results included a lot of lens artifacts, so I had to resort to makeshift ptychography. But I've attached what I could see. As far as I can tell, we're looking at conventional baryonic matter—not reified virtual matter, space-time at a true-zero energy state, an excitation of some novel field, or (Traveler save us from VanNet theories) super-extremal naked black holes masquerading as particles.

(Now, I am a little disappointed to discover that the super-vacuum hypothesis is out. Quantum physics says it's impossible to know the exact energy state of a volume of space, and "zero" is an exact energy state—so it's physically illegal for a volume of space to have zero energy when observed. That's why we get random virtual particles popping in out of the void; they're created and destroyed by the energy of emptiness. Some Warlocks thought that if you carried out the impossible task of sucking ALL the energy out of a volume of space-time, nulling out even the zero-point fluctuations and achieving a True Void, then you could achieve a physical regime where space and time themselves ceased to exist. Instead, you'd get a "space-time condensate," a superfluid vacuum capable of interacting with itself to generate structure. In this theory, the Stasis crystals were a cold so deep that they froze space-time itself! It had a certain elegance, but either the True Void does not exist, or it is not here attained, or I am just misinterpreting this data.)

The crystalline structure of the Stasis material is both spatial and temporal: it forms ordered patterns in three dimensions, and those patterns evolve over time without outside energy input. I've tried bootstrapping several models, but when I compare the predictions to the actual behavior of the crystal, the R-factor is always garbage. (I don't have the equipment to open up the Calabi-Yau manifold and peek at extra dimensions here, sorry. Maybe I'd glimpse the paracausal truth of the Darkness and start dividing in half until you had a planet full of Cowlicks and Truces all complaining.)

There's some funny stuff going on within the crystal structure: long-range multiparticle interactions that might require paracausal intervention to sustain. The crystal also soaks up incident motion and energy, which it converts into mechanical work: this is how these crystals form so rapidly, and why they're surrounded by such intense cold. (Think of it like a nucleation event in a false vacuum; the crystal keeps expanding because it's energetically favorable for it to do so, as long as its surface-area-to-volume ratio is sufficiently high.) It's also why they retain significant structural-impact volatility (they shatter really well). When you've stored so much energy in a dense lattice, you're already most of the way to a bomb. All high-energy chemical explosives are crystalline.

The actual structure of the crystal is... hard to characterize. The mass has some spooky quantum characteristics, behaving like a superfluid condensate complete with vortices, so it's hard to get information on specific areas—you get domains of the crystals behaving as single particles.

By poking random spots, I've got the idea that the crystal is composed of different isomer territories which compete along their boundaries to recruit each other. The isomer domains also generate mutants *within* themselves, which spread and take over if they have superior recruiting properties; I've even seen encysted "laboratories" where mutants compete before the winners breach the barrier and spill into the surrounding lattice. Our three queens in action again? I promise not to dive into Bieberbach's theorem and abelian subgroups, but there's some fascinating math going on here.

Now if you're up on your theory (which I am), you know that crystal structures are closely tied to symmetry groups, which by Noether's theorem, are mathematically equivalent to conservation laws: they're descriptions of the ways you can transform a physical system without breaking the rules of that system. All those old kooks were right: crystals are the basis of reality! Sort of. It was spontaneous (read: quantum) breaking of symmetries that created our universe—random perturbations that caused uniform fields to depart their symmetrical but unstable initial state and settle into one of many possible configurations permitted by the laws of physics. Like a ball rolling down the symmetrical peak of a fashionable sombrero and settling somewhere on the brim.

So that's high-level cosmology. But at the lowest levels of condensed matter physics, the crystals we're looking at here are a product of the same spontaneous symmetry breaking mechanism. Matter cooling down abruptly, generating structure.

What I'm getting at is that the "Stasis ice" is produced by the same mechanisms that created the entire universe from nothing. Cold order from hot chaos. Wild, huh? Makes you wonder if we could use the Light to heat everything back up to the primordial fire. Let it all cool down into a different shape. Maybe even a better one.

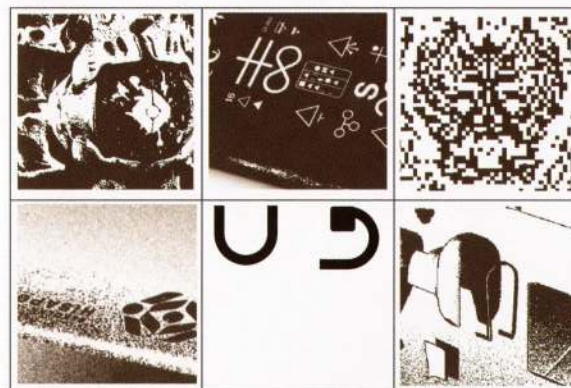
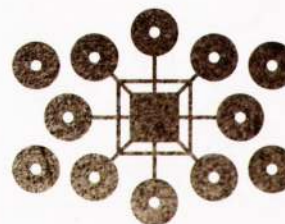
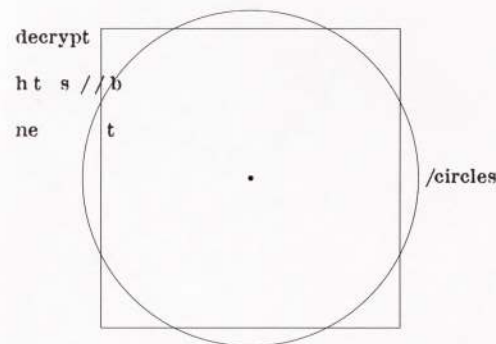
But that's the optimist in me talking.

Mathematical details appended.

P.S. Something unnerving just occurred to me. The Stasis crystals probably contain domains of superconductive electron flow. And space-time crystals are one way to implement a quantum computer. Those are both very rich media for computation. If there's evolution occurring within the crystals, as domains compete for advantage... that might favor domains with useful internal simulation of the world around them. Almost Vexy.

There might be cognition and computation happening in the Stasis crystals: thoughts in the crystals themselves, in that short span between their creation and destruction. Tiny swarming minds created and annihilated in the detonation of a grenade. Maybe something to put Shimizu on...

END APPENDMENT



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If no one likes me, humanity will go extinct

Arrogance pure arrogance but the awful thing is it's true. Given no guidance Guardians will go to their own ruin, they will saunter up to Ahamkara and Dredgens and the Winnower itself. (Give them the option to turn all their Ghosts into little black pyramids and half of them would take it.)

And we can only lead them if they like us—

They liked Cayde because he lightened them. Cayde made himself a walking joke because jokes are delightful and everyone will follow a delight.

I am not a good joker.

Cannot know every Guardian. The Tower sees hundreds of thousands of visits a day, you cannot know them all, they cannot know you. So if you are not their friend, then what are you? You have to be an idea, a caricature, a meme infecting their minds. An easily reproduced token of who you are. Shaxx shouts. Zavala fathers. Eris avenges.

I do not fit into a joke; I do not fit into a cliché. I thought that was all right: my job is to know what will happen next, to have the paths ready for others to lead them down. If they do not like me, well, I don't always like myself.

But now—

Do they like me enough to believe me? To believe in me?

Or will they rush to someone funnier? Someone more comfortable? Someone who has more to offer than uncertainty and complexity and doubt? Lies are always more comfortable than the truth. Lies can be tailored to fit.

I am supposed to be their bulwark against lies, but what if they like liars more than me?

//

VANNET PERSONAL

ANTOWGUESTACC/6cc842de4888f9899alf0e9ed97c2efa >>
VANCINCLOCK IKORA REY

Hey Ikora,

Did it ever occur to you that ERAMIS is a common language anagram for AM ERIS? It's funny how Three Eyes works for you, but now she works with me. Maybe you weren't giving her enough chances to grow.

No salutation entered,

"VIP" #1315"

VANTOWGUESTACC/6cc842de4888f9899alf0e9ed97c2efa >>
VANCINCLOCK IKORA REY

Hey Ikora,

Did you sign off on this? Zavala ordered a search of my ship to get samples of my plants? "There are known similarities between your vessel's infestation and the growths aboard the derelict Glykon Volatus." Tell the big guy that if he wants to get at my garden, he'd better start pounding some Primevals.

Transmat firing,

D

VANTOWGUESTACC/6cc842de4888f9899alf0e9ed97c2efa >>
VANCINCLOCK IKORA REY

Hey Ikora,

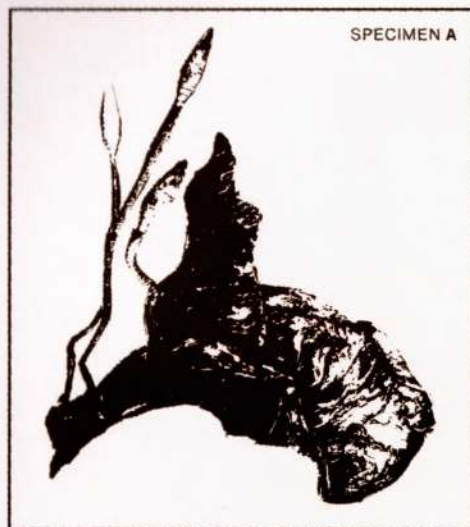
I hate ice planets. Nothing good ever happens on an ice planet. You can't even burn guts for heat when there's no air.

You and I used to push the edge of the map, remember? My crew ended up out past Neptune, exploring dwarf planets full of monoliths. But you—now you're the one in the Tower, collecting the reports, making the maps.

I always wanted to say, I admire you for throwing everything behind the hunt for Prince Udon. At least you know how to stick up for your crew.

Catch you soon,

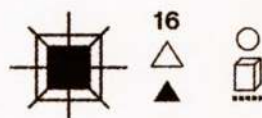
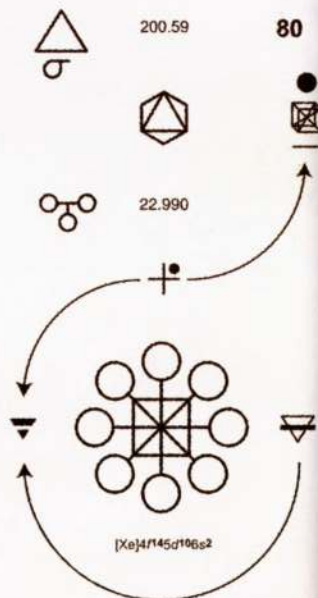
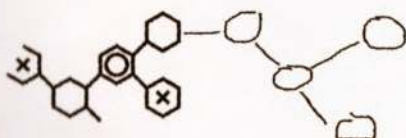
Noman



SPECIMEN A



SPECIMEN B



Dear Ikora Rey,

I am a low power Guardian. Very big fanatic of your work as Warlock caravan guard. Excuse any male propisms as I was raised without knowledge of modern language or devices due to some deficit of otherways agreeable Host. Arc heologists tell me I am female Qadan recovered from strata of Mesolithic battle site at Jebel Sahaba in Egypt and I may be up to thirteen thousand years old. Perhaps this has caused great strain in process of my re-surrection. (Original birth is not called a surrection? Death is not called a desurrection?) So I do not know much modern language or possess good weapon instincts. Sometimes think Ghost left me old fashioned on purpose due to too much love of anthropological science.

I educate myself on modern skills. This involves many conversations with comrade Guardians. I know from position of my remains that I died in a massacre. Violence of human against human is very troubling to me. So I am often upset by attitude of jaded Guardian towards Light spirit. Many Guardians read Unveiling scriptures and discuss perspective of enemy Darkness. Many Guardians prefer chatty Darkness to silent unspeaking Light. Now we have stasis, very cool. Guardians bored of Light and want to massacre each other with Darkness.

I think this happens because the Light no longer has a Speaker to speak for it. Many texts have been written to give voice to Darkness. Light is taken for granted due to silence and lack of things to argue about. Silence mistaken for complacency or impotence. Air is always silent and we need it to live; so we forget it until the flood or the storm.

Would you please use your formidable knowledge to produce an exegesis of Light which will command respect of jaded Guardians who do not let me sit at campfire because I am too straight edge.

Thank you,

Sen-Aret

ACCESS: RESTRICTED
DECRYPTION KEY: 2CA9SXU02C\$IKO-006
REP#: 093-STASIS-DIR
AGENT(S): AUN-326

**SUBJ: REQUEST FOR CLARIFIED/UPDATED STANCE
ON STASIS USERS**

1. "To be a Warlock is to understand true power." You said that. Do we, as Warlocks, truly understand Stasis? Do we understand the long-term implications of tacitly permitting the use of the Darkness? The answer is no. Our enemy's short-term planning horizon is millennial. By the time we recognize our damnation, it will be too late. We are not gambling with Human survival—we are surrendering it to the enemy.
2. You have questioned my purposes before, and I have questioned yours. Let me do so again. I have seen Ghosts—not just Guardians, but their Ghosts—who spit at the name of the Traveler. Have they freely chosen to turn against the Light that made them? If so, this is dangerous. Or have they turned out of loyalty to their Guardians? If so, they are the victims of abuse. Why do we allow this? Say: no more. Say: this must end.
3. I promised I would hunt down the corrupt, and I keep my promises. But again and again, I hear the renegades make the same excuse. The Traveler is silent. The Traveler is still. Meanwhile, the enemy whispers its offers. At least the enemy seems to care.
4. Zavala has forbidden the use of Stasis. He has personally asked prominent Guardians to abstain from using it. He has been ignored, mocked, and diminished. Yet all sanctioned punishments of rogue Stasis-using Guardians have been kept covert. When will we be allowed to make open arrests? Are we now afraid of rebellion by our own Guardians? *Isn't that proof that we should have acted sooner?* This all began with that groveling opossum the Drifter. We let him acclimate our Guardians to eating from the metaphysical garbage bin, the filth and folly of the Dark.
5. You have written philosophy on the Warlock disciplines. Where is your exegesis of Stasis? I thought you would be

first to call out its blatantly manipulative manifestation as a sparkling crystal. It is obvious that this toyetic, elemental aesthetic is meant to set Guardians at ease—to exploit our comfort with ideas of the Light as fire, lightning, and shadow. Ice is an easy and natural opposite to fire; it carries a suggestion of proper symmetry. And the way Stasis was given to the Fallen? Obvious attempt to provoke jealousy and competition. It is easy to pick up a weapon your enemy has already used against you. Turnabout is fair play.

6. If you give credit to stories of alternate timelines, then we know Eris Morn is capable of betraying and destroying humanity. Are we to do nothing to prepare? Are we to ignore her slow shift from an attitude of absolute rejection of Darkness to a wary acceptance of Stasis as "wintercraft"? What do we do if she goes further?
7. I show the rest of the world only iron certitude, but I have nothing but questions for you. Do not make me fight for the future of Guardians and all we guard by sending you unanswered memos.
8. Ikora, what are we doing? If you believe the Unveiling texts, the Traveler made a gamble on us. It said: "Here I wager that, given power over physics and the trust of absolute freedom, people will choose to build and protect a gentle kingdom ringed in spears. And not fall to temptation. And not surrender to division. And never yield to the cynicism that says, everyone else is so good that I can afford to be a little evil." Aren't we failing that trust?
9. Tell me you haven't used Stasis. Tell me you haven't.

MESSAGE ENDS

MESSAGE REPLY

FROM: IKO-006

TO: AUN-326

I'm working on something. Eris deserves our grace and our trust. She's been through so much. Once she was only driven by revenge. Now it is the possibility of fellowship that sustains her. Don't take that away.

REPLY ENDS

MESSAGE REPLY

FROM: AUN-326

TO: IKO-006

It's not a question of her desserts. I'm a Praxic. Practically speaking, I can't ignore a possible threat. And you didn't answer my question.

REPLY ENDS

MESSAGE REPLY

FROM: IKO-006

TO: AUN-326

If you can't trust me, you can't trust anyone. Let's speak of *praxis*. As far as we know, the Darkness has defeated the Traveler in every previous encounter. For the entire lifespan of the universe. The only difference this time is the presence of Guardians. We have been entrusted with the power to make our own choices. Maybe one of those choices is to do what the Traveler cannot—to find a balance between Light and Darkness. If this is the last battle, the final stand for the fate of all creation, *we cannot afford to ignore possibilities*.

REPLY ENDS

MESSAGE REPLY

FROM: AUN-326

TO: IKO-006

That's a good point. But if finding that balance is the key to victory, why is our enemy so eager to suggest it to us? And you still haven't answered my question.

REPLY ENDS

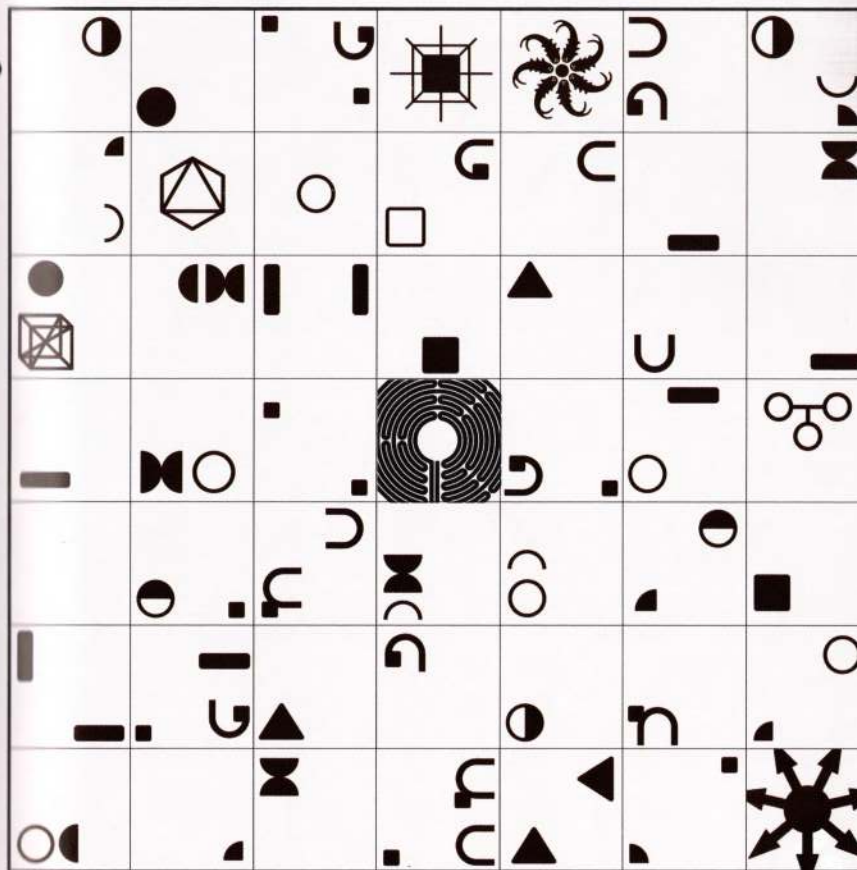
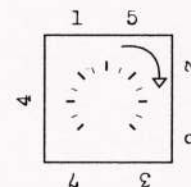
MESSAGE REPLY

FROM: IKO-006

TO: AUN-326

Of course I haven't used it. I need to be flawless as a leader. I need to be twice as good, twice as often. I can't afford an indiscretion like Stasis.

REPLY ENDS



//

An Exegesis of the Light, by Ikora Rey
First Draft

How to Understand Light, by Ikora Rey
First Draft

Why The Light Is Not Boring, by Ikora Rey
First Draft

What Illuminates Us, by Ikora Rey
First Draft

It Is Natural for Guardians to Prefer the New
and Rare but Let's Be Cautious About It, by
Ikora Rey
First Draft

Everyone Wanted A Gjallarhorn But Look
What Happened When You All Got One, or,
Why Mass Tendencies in Guardian Behavior
Can In Retrospect Be Destructive, by Ikora Rey
Ninth Draft

I'm Not Your Mom But Sometimes Mothers
Have Good Advice, by Ikora Rey
Second Draft

There's A Reason We Switched From
Edgewalker to Bladedancer, by Ikora Rey
First Draft

Familiarity Shouldn't Breed Contempt, by Ikora
Rey
First Draft

Puppies, Wheat Bread, and Doing What's
Right: Transgressive Thrills and Contempt for
the Wholesome, by Ikora Rey
First Draft

Why The Need To Commit Violence In Defense
of Life Predisposes Us to Moral Compromise by
I Can't Find A Good Title
First Draft

When The Truth Is Not In the Middle:
Why The Everyday Need for Compromise
Tricks Us Into Grand Moral quivalfislfajskl;g
jds;gldhfgoiprtbjg
First Drafts

Guardians Won't Read This Unless It Drops
An Engram Anyway, by Ikora Rey
First Draft

They'll Just Say "Ikora Should've Died Instead
of Cayde, Cayde Would've Been Down With
Stasis" And Throw It Out, by Ikora Rey
First Draft

I Hate Philosophy And Want To Go Back To
The Crucible, by Ikora Rey
First Draft

Delete All Those Things I Wrote No This Isn't
A Title Ophiuchus Just Delete Them All, by
Ikora Rey
First Draft

//

CONSENSUS PERSONAL

VANCINCTAN CMDR ZAVALA >> VANCINCLOCK IKORA REY

I have a philosophical disagreement with your decision to make the more interesting move instead of the move that brings you closer to victory. The point of a game is to exercise the faculties of war and creation. If you aren't trying to win, you undermine that exercise.

REY >> ZAVALA

Both our faculties will be better exercised by facing the unknown.

ZAVALA >> REY

But the point of a game is not to achieve the maximum beneficial exercise for both our faculties. It is to achieve victory for *yourself*. The enemy will never choose to do something interesting for both sides. The enemy will choose to win.

REY >> ZAVALA

I want to play out the situation after 6x24. I played to achieve what I want.

ZAVALA >> REY

Metagaming! How am I to get any satisfaction from beating you if you don't play to win?

REY >> ZAVALA

I'll get back to you after Consensus. I don't want you to spend the whole session planning your reply.

SUBJ: PERSONAL EXAMINATION OF THE GLYKON
VOLATUS DERELICT

1. As the site of a numinous encounter with the Darkness, the Glykon Volatus derelict deserved my direct inspection. I will record here only what I can add to past reports.
2. The sarcophilous growths overrunning the ship are a clever trick, aren't they? To pass the densest thickets, you must link with them. Engineered to remind one of the need to use Darkness to fight Darkness. When I joined that link, I felt what others have reported: a collective haunting. The presence of all those who were devoured by the ship.
3. Why is it that so many places touched by Darkness carry a sense of memory? The nightmares we fought on the Moon. These haunted growths. The Taken, who are the product of a literal taking of the will. Even the Unveiling missives, delivered in a clear and casual first person. The common element of identity, memory, consciousness. While the Light is impersonal and silent: it is everywhere and in all things, but invisibly so. Silently so.

Why should memory and identity belong to the Darkness? Pujari claimed that it was important to understand why Guardians return without an identity. *Do* we understand why?

If memory and identity belong to the Darkness, does Darkness itself have an identity? A personality? A voice?

Is this voice the same as the Darkness itself?

4. Savathûn in her Osiris mask personally oversaw the first expedition to the Glykon Volatus. What did she gain? Was she confirming the success of a game against Calus—an assassination by proxy? Listen to the comments she made. "Those spores are harmonizing with a nearby concentration of Darkness." How casually she speaks of the Darkness; like it is another substance to gather and pump. Did she mean to trick us into treating Darkness instrumentally? Just fluid, just a black ooze of evil.

Corruption depicted as something you could ladle with a spoon. Would a non-Human intelligence recognize fungus and fluid as signs of true evil? Or are these anthropomorphic symbols, tapping into our fear of rot?

If they are symbols—what are they meant to communicate?

5. True evil feels like Nazino Island. I visited it years ago, searching for a lost friend. The earth seemed cold and dry and thick. When it rained, there was this smell... Ophiuchus wouldn't speak above a whisper. The river Ob has dried and withdrawn, so the island has become a mountain in a sea of forest. But something other than trees grows there. I would swear it.

We found a place where lightning had struck more than once, and I dug. Found Human bones; fibula and tibia and long femurs. All with knife marks. Scraped clean of meat. We do not know exactly what happened on Nazino, but Ophi whispered to me what he felt: a faceless machine, grinding over innocent life, lubricated by neglect and indifferent compliance. Indifferent to the suffering it caused. And like a vast slug, it left a stain behind.

But is what I felt Human evil, or *universal* evil? Is there a difference? Is there a malice which all species of all psychologies could agree upon?

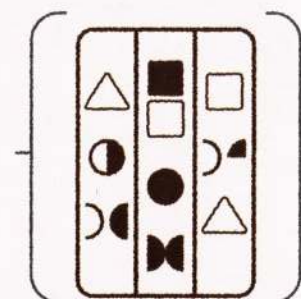
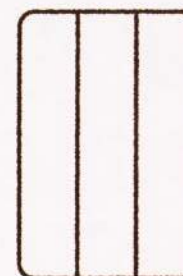
The mark of suffering lingered on Nazino Island. It lingers on the Glykon Volatus. What makes evil stain a place? By what media, in what ink or bile is that evil written?

Which is easier to remember—happiness or suffering? Which stains deeper? On the Moon, we met only nightmares. Do only nightmares linger...?

Ha. Maybe the answer is right beside me. We are all haunted by our own good Ghost, aren't we?

6. The documents found aboard the Glykon Volatus attest to Calus's belief in a presence on the far side of his contact ritual. An observer. Is there a wielder of Darkness, as we are wielders of Light? One, or many? When Oryx called the Darkness down into an Ogre to speak with him, was this the voice that answered? Mara says there is a distinction between Darkness and its chief exponent.
7. A single, dominant wielder would suit the ideology of the Darkness, as expressed in the Books of Sorrow and the Unveiling missives—one leader who has either extinguished or subjugated all others. Winnowed them down to only the most necessary and effective form. We are many Guardians, a complex plurality of Light, against one Dark agency.
8. In the face of the malignant and continuous suffering aboard this ship, Katabasis's Ghost Gilgamesh gave up on his Guardian. It demanded to be destroyed as relief from the pain of a hopeless existence. Katabasis was left to suffer an unspeakable fate. We're all familiar with stories of lapsed or mistreated Ghosts, whether from the Dredgens or from personal encounters with VIP #3015 and the sadly departed Asher Mir. We've all heard of Guardians who wanted to refuse further resurrection. But this level of despair on the Ghost's part is unique. And if prolonged close contact with agencies of the Darkness has this effect on all Ghosts, can we expect a massive failure of Ghost morale? A general turn towards pessimism and antinatalism?
9. Against overwhelming fear, we must find a way to articulate the strength and value of the Light. Despair and apathy have killed more Guardians than any other force. Hope will be our most important armor in the war to come. We must find a way to show our fighting Guardians and their Ghosts that even when they wield Stasis, they do not turn their backs on the Light.

MESSAGE ENDS



IAMTHECRUC SHAXX >> VANCINCLOCK IKORA REY

dear ikora rey, champion of the crucible, memorable pain in my arse,

resting my voice as i dictate this. my ghost forbids me to incinerate myself so i can return with a fresh throat. guardians did admire that trick. they called me the bellowing phoenix! ha ha! reborn in fire to shout again!

you wrote to me about ghost morale in the crucible. how do the fretful things stay happy when their guardians die so much? the truth is, ikora, that the crucible attracts those who have a tolerance for fat lips and burnt fingers. the ghosts are not bothered by their charges' annihilation so long as it is all in the game.

but i did notice a change in the tone of the crucible when i let my natural enthusiasm shine through! reprimands were not encouraging the improvement i wanted. even the audience felt sour and sad when i chastened a newcomer.

the answer was behavioral therapy! accompanied by a course of nootropics to promote neural plasticity and fight depression! by the end of the sessions, i was battering straight through the walls of the clinic in my excitement to show the world who i was! i visited city hospitals and helped children learn how to squeeze the illness straight out of their own shadows. i once headbutted a probability kiln so hard that it produced a live cabal centurion, which i then arm wrestled into submission! when i brought my new excitement to the crucible, i delighted my players and my audience.

we all have our fears and regrets, certainly. have i ever told you about my night of passion with queen mara sov? the passion we shared was *pothos*, the longing for freedom. this was before oryx and before my own renewal. i longed for freedom from my duties; she longed for freedom from her doom. *the tempest* is a play saturated with the yearning for freedom! it is also concerned with the relationship between master and servant; and when i had finished reciting it, mara asked me to tell her stories of the once-servant who she yearned to meet again as an equal.

sjur eido! the woman i named a tempest!

i told her stories of my friendship with sjur eido and her great bow. mara told me of the lost tributary, and of sjur eido's quest to assassinate her in revenge for the diasym. i challenged the

obvious lies in this story—the sjur eido i knew, dragon slayer whose arrows pierced illusion, would never have hesitated to kill, no matter how beautiful her target! and how could sjur, who shrugged off talk of gods as nothing of her concern, have also been a fanatical servant of this diasym, who cared only for lost divinity? inconsistent! and therefore a lie!

mara was delighted by my disbelief. she told me that she would tell me the truth about sjur if i would only take off my helmet, so she could look into the eyes that had gazed so often on her beloved.

did you know that *pothos* is another name for *asphodelia*, the white flower of the awoken? white flower of longing.

ikora, here is a question i long to have answered: why did you leave the crucible?

shaxx

VANCINCLOCK IKORA REY - IAMTHECRUC SHAXX

Dear Shaxx, Lord of the Crucible,

You and I both know that the Crucible I fought in was darker and more dangerous than the games you run today. Remember Thakor?

The truth is that I could not afford to be both Warlock Vanguard and a Crucible champion. To fight in the Crucible is to show the whole world the limits of your power.

I could not afford to lose and be revealed as limited. But more importantly, I could not afford to win. What would they say if they knew what I could really do? The danger I could be?

Properly yours,

Ikora Rey

SUBJ: FOLLOWUP ON AFFIDAVIT FOR INCID #12059

1. Fenchurch (and Neville!) reporting in. I've finally been able to sit ERI-223 down for a few moments and ask her about the vision I experienced on Luna. (See my affidavit regarding #12059.) In short, I saw VIP #0704 tending to ERI-223's wounds in the wreckage of a destroyed vessel. This was prior to the discovery of the Pyramid on Luna. I now believe the wreckage was from a ship of the same type: one of the intruders that presaged the disappearance of Mars, Io, Titan, and Mercury.
2. ERI-223 was reticent to discuss whether the event in my vision had actually occurred. I expressed my frustration with her evasiveness, given the distance I had traveled and my well-established loyalties. ERI-223 invoked the threat of SAV as a reason to favor secrecy. I asked whether she had been too much influenced by VIP #0704's habits of distrust. She did not reply. As a social gesture, I offered to share my pineapple fried rice, which caused her tremendous distress. After collecting the remnants of the meal, I left.
3. Later that day, ERI-223 approached me to apologize and attempt the conversation again. I was moved and allowed her to open the topic on her own terms. After an elliptical conversation regarding the emotional burden of her role as a constant harbinger of worse to come, ERI-223 confirmed that my vision had actually occurred.
4. According to ERI-223's account, during the time between the Tangled Shore crisis and the discovery of the lunar Pyramid, VIP #0704 was in contact with VIP #0101 regarding the approaching intruders. VIP #0101, familiar with the difficulties of recursing time loops, urged #0704 to break out of the Dreaming City and move against the intruders. In #0101's past timeline or timelines (I am not convinced she has been entirely truthful about how she moves between times; it would make sense for her to protect her method of transit, given the scale of betrayal she has witnessed), the Awoken never broke SAV's curse on the Dreaming City, and #0704 expended vital resources there, which were sorely missed during the later stages of the conflict.

5. VIP #0704 was reluctant to leave her people, but decided, as ERI-223 put it, "that it was better to do something than nothing, even if that something was the wrong thing." VIP #0704 struck a deal with #0101: #0101 would provide data that a future Rasputin had used to track the intruder ships, and #0704 would provide the raw paracausal power that Rasputin lacked. ERI-223 was involved because #0704 had recently extracted her from Crota's abandoned throne world, and felt an emotional debt to #0704 over past service regarding the defeat of VIP #2015. This was fortuitous.
6. VIP #0704 exploited past traffic with the Nine as well as her own personal experience with the intruders' stealth capabilities to disperse an array of "synthetic aperture mass growl observatories" coordinated by AI-COM/XBLK and possibly other deep-orbit AI systems. The observatories used future technology provided by #0101 to localize an interloper ship near the dwarf planet 136199 Eris. ERI-223 was not amused by this coincidence. (I induce she was actually quite disturbed).
7. VIP #0704 refused to deploy any Awoken fleet assets or Fallen mercenaries in the confrontation, and even excluded her own Techeuns from the planning. ERI-223 suggests, with what I view as some protectiveness, that #0704 felt it was time for the burden of sacrifice to fall on her rather than upon her citizens or pawns.

The journey to 136199 Eris was very difficult for ERI-223. VIP #0704 had charged herself with some metaphysical quality salvaged from VIP #2015, which made it extremely difficult for Eris to tolerate her presence. VIP #0704 was reticent and snappish; probably lingering trauma from her death in the similar battle at Saturn. Whatever transpired between them remains private.

8. ERI-223 was unwilling to precisely describe the encounter with the intruder. It did not react to their presence as they matched orbits. VIP #0704 went on EVA and at one point removed her suit. I believe, but am not certain, that #0704 either contacted or entered the intruder. Whatever happened next led to VIP

#0704's death. It is unclear to me whether the intruder was at all damaged, or whether the debris field I saw on the surface of 136199 Eris was related to this encounter.

9. ERI-223 recalled VIP #0704 from her throne by Hive ritual, which required both women to confront SAV/INCAR at great personal risk. The two then descended to the surface of Eris to explore the wreckage there. There was an incident (it may have been an attack, or an accident caused by volatile debris or by interaction with 136199 Eris's frozen methane surface), and ERI-223 was badly wounded. Although ERI-223 has techniques to survive in hostile environments, they were disrupted and she was exposed to near-vacuum. VIP #0704 deployed a shelter and treated the wounds in what I interpolate was a moment of reconciliation and perhaps genuine tenderness between them. ERI-223 attempted to show me the scar, although I declined.

At this point, concerned that they might not survive to make a report, ERI-223 imprinted a log of their journey on a fragment of debris and transmitted it to Luna via Hive manifold, along with a compulsion for any lesser Hive to bring the fragment to a Guardian. This is how it came to me.

10. I am left with more questions. Was the presence of a debris field on the surface totally unrelated to the ship in orbit? If it was related, did VIP #0704 destroy it; and if so, why has she not shared this capability with us? Faced with the skepticism and distrust of so many Guardians (a distrust that has persisted despite #0101's reports that in multiple possible futures, #0704 died fighting alongside our forces in the final reckoning), surely #0704 would want to advertise her victory. If she did destroy that Pyramid ship, was it a one-off event that she will be unable to reproduce? Perhaps she has to physically contact a Pyramid to destroy it, and the Pyramids have now rendered this impossible. Or perhaps she approached in the disguise of VIP #2015, a disguise which is now compromised. VIP #0704 remains a difficult and inscrutable ally.

MESSAGE ENDS

MESSAGE REPLY

FROM: IKO-006

TO: FEN-092

Mara is a thorny problem. Understand that she sees herself as a queen on a chessboard. Opposite her stands Savathûn. They are in a war of understanding—who will get to the truth of the other first? In this war, honesty is fatal. Giving the enemy accurate information about you helps them remove degrees of freedom from their model of you. It helps them come a little closer to perfectly predicting you.

Savathûn would delight to see Mara Taken. Mara would certainly see Savathûn dead and extinguished.

Secrets and encryption are central to Mara's philosophy, and so too to the entire Awoken consciousness. She is their Lucifer, their Melek Taus or Feanor, the one who led a bloody exodus from heaven to fight for the mortal world. Remember the words of their scripture: "Creation is built on secrets and the encryptions that keep those secrets safe."

If Mara botches her endgame against Savathûn and against the entity that she believes rules in Darkness, all of the sacrifices she's made will be for nothing. And she knows, thanks to Elsie, that in many possible futures her sacrifices were in vain. She knows she was betrayed by her own friend, Eris Morn.

You see why it's so hard for her to trust? She entrusted her very life to Eris. And yet even Eris turned against her, in one possible world.

Mara will never tell the truth when she can afford to lie. She will never act directly when she can afford to move a pawn. But the opposite is also true: she will never lie when she can afford to tell the truth.

She just rarely considers it safe to do so. If your enemy knows how the bomb works, they can disarm it.

I believe Mara has begun to consider that she may not be the prime executor of her own endgame. She may be just one component of the bomb—a payload or a timing device. At the end of her own journey, she is necessary but not sufficient. She can no longer fight alone.

REPLY ENDS

ACCESS: MOST RESTRICTED
DECRYPTION KEY: Z2TET3C4WZTLRL8NV5KS\$IKO-006

MESSAGE REPLY
FROM: IKO-006
TO: CHA-319

SUBJ: PERSONAL REPLY

You can say "hey, friend" if you really want to. Not in public though. Without a proper chain of command, we have to get by on respect.

You asked me: what do we call this sense Ghosts have for the nature of the dead? In Warlock studies, the customary term is "insight." I have also heard "scrutiny" and (among our more worldly Hunters) "the weird eye." I asked Ophiuchus and he said he thought of it as "congruence." But I like to call it "determination." It means so many different things. Fate. Contingency. Judgment. Persistence in struggle.

Ghostsight is determination.

It wouldn't be a friendship if it stopped when we didn't talk about it. I don't think the sunyata principle involves apology, but I feel your hurt that I haven't made enough time for you. I haven't made time for most things! All my time is spent trying to answer questions. So many people want answers from me, and I have no certainty to give them.

What am I if not a source of certitude? What am I? Nothing. But it is good to be nothing, isn't it; it is good to rise above the demands of the world so we can act without compulsion.

Only what if that is an excuse? What if the act of destroying my self and making my self void so that I exist unmoved by the demands of the world and in contact with transcendent truth is just a cheat?

What if I am just absolving myself, spiritually, of my responsibility to do everything possible to protect what little Light and life remain?

What if I am being existentially lazy? If the Traveler is the only hope we have to escape a winnowing nightmare that will devour all possible organized systems in all possible futures, then by failing to dedicate myself wholly to the Traveler's work at all hours and with all thoughts, I am failing all the beings that will be extinguished by that nightmare future. Therefore, I am guilty of causing infinite harm, making me the worst woman to have ever existed, and oh Chalco, you see what haunts me at night. You see why I escape into circles? I am possessed by doubt, manic with it, itching under my fingernails. I wake up with doubt. I meditate on doubt. I snap at people who deserve kindness

because doubt seeps out like bad caulk from the seams of me.

So now, I unload this doubt onto you. Only you; you are the only one who I will show it to. Oh Chalco—I am losing myself in doubt! Do we ban Stasis? Do we use Stasis? Do we arrest the Stasis users? Do we endorse them openly so they will not be outcasts?

Are Light and Dark meant to be balanced? Or is the Dark a subtle poison that will seep into us until we are all turned? How can I know for sure? How can I know well enough to choose, with the whole universe at stake? Not by any method I know can I understand these things! I do not have Mara's arrogance; I cannot set the conditions of an entire future and choose for all the choosers unless I know I am doing the right thing!

Me, me, me—here I am, complaining about myself and how hard things are. This will bore you—you are a person and a person needs to know they are thought of, and I am not thinking enough of you. But isn't this what you wanted, to know what was happening inside me without needing to ask? Well, here it is, my unformatted vomitorium of doubt. We are this close to losing them all, every Guardian, returning to the Dark Ages of Warlords and factions. All that saves us is what little authority the Vanguard still retains. Is Stasis the hill we die on? We forbade the Ahamkara, and to do it, we had to make the Ahamkara extinct. Though maybe we were doing their work for them; maybe we were just propelling them along the anathematic arc and towards the unspeakable Cord they wanted to climb, out of this world and into another metaphysics that somehow sustains our own. Do we have to make Stasis extinct just as we did the Ahamkara?

I stop myself here. I remind myself of what I know.

The popularity of Stasis is a direct result of a structure of power. A system we built, here in the Vanguard, to incentivize our Guardians to respect and obey. Rewards for joining strike missions. Bounties and milestones to quantify hard work. Elite equipment for loyal performers. Everything psychologically calibrated to engage the Guardian who might otherwise lapse into a useless fugue and vanish

from the rosters of the active. We built this system, we benefited from this system, so we did not change it.

Nowhere in that system is there any place for moral judgment. Nowhere is there any ethical instruction, no request for them to evaluate their ultimate purpose. Guardians do what makes them most effective. Because we taught them to do so.

This is our fault. We made our Guardians into soldiers, not warriors for good. We led them straight to the enemy's fold: all It had to do was offer a new and intriguing way to get that Glimmer, that loot, that bounty, that victory. And It had them. I can forgive a few Guardians for doing what had to be done to defeat Eramis. But I cannot forgive myself for letting all these other Guardians follow.

And why would we teach our Guardians to question the rightness of their own actions? Guardians don't like to doubt. I urged them to meditate on their past, and I thought that'd be enough. But even the meditations were just challenges to do it again, but better.

I've been a fool, and I don't know how to fix it. Chalco, they ask me questions, and I don't know how to answer them! I can't even tell them who I am because I am afraid that who I am will not be perfect enough. And they will see the flaws in me and turn away!

—and the Traveler's reawakening DID change what circles mean, you Hunter barbarian! Perfectly squaring the circle cannot be accomplished with classical construction so long as π is a transcendental number, because root π is not constructable (that is, constructable by compass and a straight edge in finite steps). But paracausal invocation allows us to set root π to an arbitrary value even in a flat manifold, and because the sphere of the awakened Traveler defines a toroid in n dimensions—oh, but this is all evading your point, isn't it?

Pujari wrote that Ghosts had disproven the existence of absolute, incorruptible good in Human beings. Because Ghosts came from the Traveler, which is an absolute good. So they should choose only the absolutely best people to become Guardians. But we got Warlords anyway, and people like Dredgen Yor, and even like the Drifter. Which proves there is no inner goodness that cannot be broken by a cruel world full of violence and privation. Of course, Pujari didn't allow for the fallibility of Ghosts.

I feel like I've just said something very important and don't know what it was.

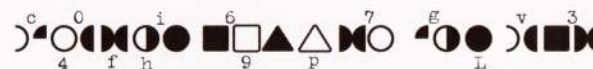
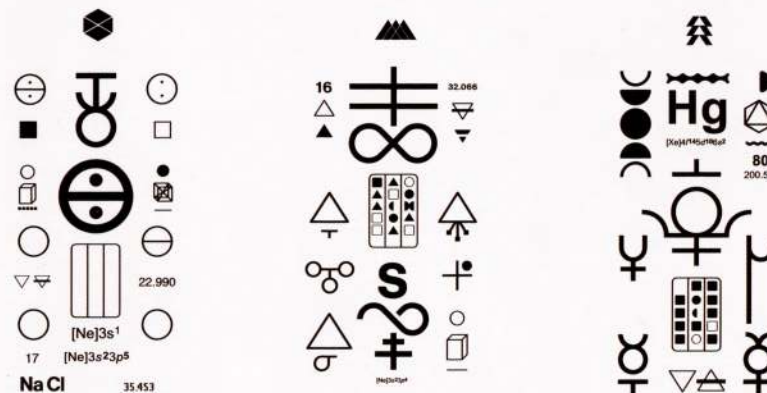
You're right that people think I'm distant and absent. And it's because... I feel that people need confidence, not confusion. People seem confident when they don't change. So I stay remote, because what's far away seems immovable. Get too close to people, and there's emotional

parallax—they can see how you change. They see that you're complicated inside. I can't afford that. I have to be simple for them, simple as Shaxx.

Something hurt me recently, Chalco. Something Elsie told me about her future. She said I died at Savathûn's hands. That I died brutally. And the Zavala in her future told her I died because I was stubborn and self-righteous. I know it was another Zavala, wounded and in pain. But to hear that from a man whom I respect so deeply... does *he* think I'm too distant? Even him? When we've shared so much...

Thank you for your report. I don't know what to call what we are, Chalco. It's just what we are. Thank you, always, for writing. Maybe I can find some clarity in action now that I've gotten this out.

REPLY ENDS



//

By the mind of Empress Caiatl,
written in proxy by Her Scribe,

May the water of the Y-goblet wash this message clean of falsehood,
Each and every word in service to the people and the future of
the Cabal,

It begins.

To the spymaster and biumvir of the human City, Ikora Rey,

The Empress Caiatl demands that you reveal all that you know
of the current status of the deposed Calus.

Be thou now informed that the deposed Calus is wanted for
high imperial crimes including the genocide of the Clipse
people, perversion of the Imperial Throne for the solicitation
of unnatural bribes and favors, and traffic with powers most
attainted.

Be thou further informed that any collaboration with the
deposed Calus either covert or overt shall be grounds for the
greatest displeasure of the Empress.

It ends.

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ENCRYPTED PERSONAL

VANCINCLOCK IKORA REY >> VANCINCTAN CMDR ZAVALA

What do you think? She wants to know if we found Calus
aboard the Glykon Volatus?

ZAVALA >> REY

Certainly. She wants to know that we're not negotiating with
her father behind her back. Which we're not.

Are we?

REY >> ZAVALA

I can't speak for every one of our Guardians who experienced
the, ah, entertainments aboard the Leviathan. But my Hidden
have absolutely no formal contact with Calus. I'm going to reply
bluntly.

ZAVALA >> REY

That seems wise. Are you aware of the religious significance of
the Y-goblet? It means this Psion is part of a spiritual minority.
Remarkable to see the phrase used openly by a scribe the
empress clearly trusts.

REY >> ZAVALA

Has someone been gifting you Cabal religious histories? And
why does she call me biumvir?

ZAVALA >> REY

Because you're one of the two most powerful people in our
government, Ikora.

REY >> ZAVALA

I'm relieved I didn't think of that. I don't feel like much of a
ruler; Guardians only listen to me if they feel like it.

Have you considered a state marriage to Caiatl to solidify our
alliance?

ZAVALA >> REY

Have you?

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By the mind of Ikora Rey, who needs no proxy,

May this message find the Y-goblet full,
Each and every word in service to the people
and future of the City,

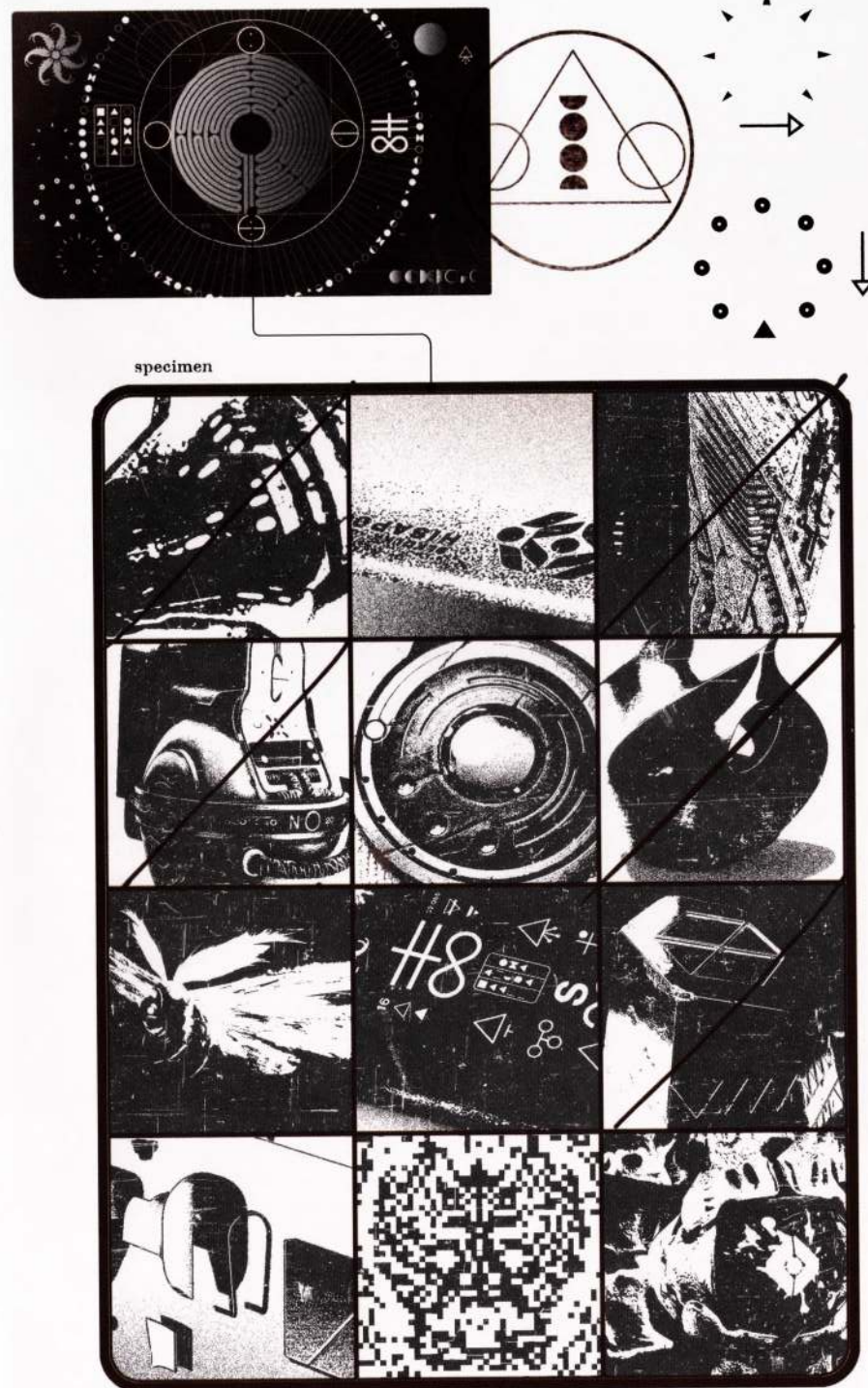
It begins.

We know nothing of Calus's fate. We have no interest in
pursuing contact with him. Nor have we ever sought formal
relations with his court. Guardians who seek his patronage do
so without the approval of the Tower.

This information is offered freely as thanks for the empress's
assistance during recent crises. But if we do become aware
of Calus's disposition, we will not share this information
unconditionally. We require that the empress provide
concession or information of like value in exchange for access
to our intelligence.

It ends.

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SUBJ: STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF IKO-006

1. IKO-006 has until now resisted all requests to undergo the standard test battery. I have convinced her to go on record by accusing her of vanity. Her power can't be so astonishing that to merely assess it for a private file would cause serious unrest. In exchange, I have been induced to include her own philosophical cavil in paragraph 2. Although she has very demonstratively declared that she will not read this file, I don't believe her.
2. IKO-006 comments: "Guardians insist on treating 'power' as a monotonically increasing value with a single dimension. Guardians will casually create ordinal ranks of the 'power' of their comrades when, in truth (but not in fact—Light is not constrained by facts) capability with the Light is not only a multifactor landscape but strongly and stochastically influenced by circumstantial, personal, and esoteric variables. The Light is, by definition, paracausal and obeys a logic different from physical concepts like charge, heat, or angular momentum. Any analogy to these physical measurements of 'power' will fail to capture the true efficacy of a Guardian. Instead, we must look to self-understanding, clarity of purpose, and internalized phenomenologies and ontologies. (Witness the self-reinforcing rise of Guardian classes and subclasses as logically consistent and easily transmitted bundles of technique: essentially, Guardian cultural artifacts based on distinct interpretations of the Light; kernel logics from which implementations easily unfold. Or, put differently, optima of discoverability in a phase space of possible techniques.) The Human or neohuman mind is an agglomeration of automatic processes, and consciousness cannot access most of them; in the same way, most of the truth of the Light is invisible to the self-inspection of the Lightbearer. Asking any Guardian, myself not excluded, to leap through a few experimental hoops is not and never will be an effective way to test either their tactical or their epistemological ability."
3. IKO-006 ranks in the upper fraction of the 99th percentile of assessed Warlocks on most available metrics of precision, restraint, and raw power. She is, in simplistic terms, a fifth sigma Guardian: 1 in 3.5 million. Given that millions of Guardians have been activated over the centuries since the Collapse, and assuming that performance of Guardians on these metrics is normally distributed, we would expect about ten Guardians of similar power to have existed. Probability favors IKO-006's existence but also her rarity: she is neither an average Guardian nor evidence for some special intervention by the Traveler. Complaints that her talents are overblown or inflated in order to reinforce her authority, or that she benefits from the special favor of a higher power, are sorely mistaken and ignorant of basic statistics. (These complaints come from the same people who ask why we haven't reconquered the whole solar system with our vast strength, forgetting how many Guardians are either in abeyance after exhaustion, still working on mastering their first subclass, or already committed to the protection of populations and resources here on Earth.)
4. It is notable that IKO-006 initially performed at only one sigma above the mean on most metrics. It was her lengthy experience in the field and in Crucible exercises which brought her to her current exemplary state. Can we determine whether this was a process of activating extraordinary latent power, or simply of honing ordinary power to an extraordinary peak? Signs point to no.
5. IKO-006 is aware that I am required to outline possible countermeasures in the event of her subversion. Of course, we are all aware that combat between Guardians is not a zero-sum contest of power. Context and tactics are decisive. Crucible champions dropped into the wilderness can be brought low by mere Fallen skirmishers; seasoned rangers may die from the first Crucible aspirant to skid knees-first into them with a shotgun. The fundamental challenge to defeating IKO-006 is that it is very difficult to create a

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context she cannot master. Her talents are honed towards acquiring and processing information. It would be difficult for even a Golden Age Human to understand the timespan she has lived, or to grasp the depth and range of the intuitive mechanisms, both cognitive and paracausal, which Ikora has cultivated and internalized. She has achieved a limited clairvoyance; an arsenal of honed preconscious heuristics which deliver her, with no more effort than water flowing downhill, to her easiest path to victory. Her goal acts as an attractor in the chaotic landscape of possible futures. She is capable of correctly resolving quandaries, like the halting problem, which a Turing machine could not compute given the entire age of the universe. In the great tradition of context manipulators versus brute force, Ikora is another victory for the power of context manipulation.

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6. One possible countermeasure is to create a false path to victory to decoy Ikora's senses. The paracausal nature of the Light creates some difficulty because it can interact directly with ontology. Ikora has a sense of truth *qua* truth. She may be aware that a deception is a deception simply because it *is a deception*. Therefore, a calculated fold in the tactical environment designed to draw Ikora into a vulnerable position may fail simply because it is intended to harm her.
 7. If I can name a single weakness in IKO-006, it is her distaste for doubt. She thinks quickly and clearly. She is accustomed to receiving the highest quality information and subjecting it to the most pristine and multiply contingent analysis. Cut off her senses. Make her anxious, force her to doubt herself, and then flood her with contradictory and high-stakes decisions which cannot be optimized. She will either paralyze herself or turn to raw fury. The fury, at least, is predictable.
 8. Test battery results attached. Remember the standard caveats about attempting to systemize and quantify a paracausal system that depends on the internal state of a weakly godlike being and its resurrected Human client.

END FILE

Pinned in one move, Chalco...

